



MUTTON LEG BIRRIA

This is one of my favourite meals, this recipe is traditionally prepared in Guadalajara Jalisco, but my family is from Mexico City so each region and family has its own style and this is so far my favourite.

The slow cooked mutton or goat marinated in dried red chilies gives a delicious flavour to the broth. The dish is then served with a side of tortillas, lime and finely chopped onion to make tacos out of the meat in the soup. When we lived in New York and would stay out having drinks until the early hours, Birria at our local Mexican cafe in Brooklyn was an absolute must. They only served it on the weekends, given it is such a special dish that takes time to make.

But it is definitely worth it.

I love this broth because it's perfect for a winter evening but also perfect for a hangover or when you catch the flu as it is a bit spicy and hearty.

In Mexico it is enjoyed at weddings, Christenings and at festivities like at Easter when lamb would be used.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 kg Goat / Mutton Leg
No worries if you can't find Mutton or Goat, leg of Lamb also works perfectly, but I prefer Mutton as it has a deeper flavour
- 12 Ancho Chillies *deveined and deseeded*
- 6 Guajillo Chillies *deveined and deseeded*
- 6 Morita Chillies *deveined and deseeded*
- 6 Cloves
- 1 Cinnamon Stick
- 1/2 tsp Cumin
- 1 tsp Mexican Oregano
- 1 TSP Apple Cider Vinegar
- 6 Bay Leaves
- 4 Large Red Onions
- 1.5 kg Tomatoes
- 200 grs Garlic
- 4 Springs of Thyme
- Salt - to taste
- Pepper - to taste

Garnish:

- Chopped Red Onion
- Coriander
- Lime

Always accompanied with tortillas so you can make your own tacos.

RECIPE AND METHOD

1. Roast 500g of tomatoes, 3 onions (reserve 1 for garnish) and the 200 grams of whole garlic cloves in a non-stick pan with a bit of vegetable oil. Once they are slightly charred and soft, leave them to rest and leave to one side.

2. In a very hot dry pan toast cloves and cinnamon stick, grind them and put in to one side. Toast all the chillies in a skillet without burning them, then rehydrate them with just enough hot water to cover them for around 10 minutes or until soft.

3. Once your chillies are rehydrated put all the dry chillies and the water you have soaked them in, along with the toasted and grounded clove and cinnamon, cumin, oregano, a pinch of black pepper, apple cider vinegar. Once the tomatoes, onions and garlic are charred put them in a blender with just enough water to properly mix all ingredients together. Add salt to taste and create a paste. This should be slightly on the saltier side as it is going to be the rub (known as the adobo in Mexico) for the Goat or Mutton and should be left to rest overnight.

4. The following morning, take the goat or mutton out of the fridge and leave it to rest at least for a couple of hours.

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RECIPE AND METHOD CONT

5. In the meantime, blend the remaining kilo of tomatoes with 1 Lt of water to make the puree for the broth. Preheat your oven 180 degrees. Place the meat in a deep oven tray, add the tomatoes and water puree. Add thyme and bay leaves to the cooking liquid. Adjust seasoning to taste and then place in the oven. After the first half an hour, turn the heat down to 90 degrees and cook for 4 to 5 hours. Cover completely with tin foil to avoid evaporation.

6. Once fully cooked, shred the meat and then return to the broth it was cooked in. Adjust water level and seasoning if necessary according to taste.

7. Serve in a bowl with enough broth and meat, garnished with chopped onion and coriander. This soup - like most soups in Mexico are a full meal - Mexicans always accompanied Birria with corn tortillas, always - so we can make our own tacos. Provecho!

*Recipe originally written for the Guardian.
Photo credits to Louise Hagger*